Elisa S. Amore , Kiera Legend

Demigods Academy: Year One (Demigods Academy, 1)

United States of America (2019)

TAGS: Aphrodite Ares Athena Demeter Dionysus / Dionysos Erebus Hades Hephaestus Hera Heracles Zeus





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Author of the Entry	Ayelet Peer, Bar-Ilan University, ayelet.peer@biu.ac.il
Peer-reviewer of the Entry	Lisa Maurice, Bar-Ilan University, lisa.maurice@biu.ac.il Elżbieta Olechowska, University of Warsaw, elzbieta.olechowska@gmail.com

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Creators



Elisa S. Amore , b. 1984
(Author)

Elisa S. Amore is an Italian best-selling novelist of young adult fantasy who resides in Switzerland. She is the author of the internationally successful supernatural saga Touched. In 2016 her books were translated to English.

She was named by the American online Fantasy Magazine as "the undisputed queen of romantic fantasy." In 2016 Amore's books were translated to English.

Source:

Official Website (accessed: November 23, 2020).

Bio prepared by Ayelet Peer, Bar-Ilan University, ayelet.peer@biu.ac.il



Kiera Legend (Author)

Kiera Legend writes urban fantasy and paranormal novels. Among her books are "The Citadel" series.

Source:

kieralegend.com (accessed: November 23, 2020).

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Additional information

Sequels, Prequels and Spin-offs	Next book: *Year Two*.

Summary

Melany Richmond is an outsider. She is an 18-year-old orphan girl, with blue hair, piercings and tattoos. Her appearance is disapproved of by the Demos family (especially their snotty and spoiled 18-year-old daughter, Callie), a rich, posh Greek family from Pecunia. Melany and her adoptive mother, Sophia, live on the grounds of the Demos' estate, where Sophia is the family's housekeeper. Melany has been living there for five years but does not feel like she truly belongs there.

In the fictional Pecunia, as Melany tells us, "the families were mostly Greek and devout to the Gods." (p. 4). When members of this world turn 18, they receive a Shadowbox, which is a special gift from the Greek gods in return for their worship. If they are lucky, they receive an invitation to join the Gods' Army. That is, to join the Demigods Academy and train to be a soldier.

Callie's family worships and donates to the gods, hence she was certain she would receive the coveted invitation. However, her box only contained a birthday greeting. She throws the box in contempt and Melany takes it. She does not really believe in the gods or in the academy. However, when she opens the box in her room, she is shocked to find a mysterious invitation. Melany thinks it is aimed for Callie, yet she is resolved to use this invitation and leave her unhappy life behind. When she turned 18, she didn't receive such a box and is curious about it and about the academy. Later that night, Melany arrives at the rendezvous point, although she nearly misses it. Then, with the other recruits, she enters the academy. She keeps thinking that she is a fraud, using Callie's invitation, and she hopes she is not found out.

One of the first recruits Melany meets is Lucian, in whom she instantly takes an interest. The story is narrated via the different viewpoints of Melany and Lucian, thus revealing the characters inner thoughts and also feelings towards each other. The two become friends and later a couple, although Lucian's snobby and jealous childhood friend, Revana, deliberately tries to give Melany a hard time at the academy.

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During their first-year studies, the students take various classes led by the gods, from Demeter's nature classes to Pythia's prophecy lessons. They practice their combat skills with Ares and Hercules and mastery of shades with Erebus. They even work at the forge with Hephaestus. One night, Melany eavesdrops on a strange conversation between Aphrodite and Ares, but they notice her presence. She thinks that there is something strange going on between them but is not sure what. In Zeus' elemental class, Melany apparently dies from Zeus' static electricity, yet is resurrected. This event causes a stir at the academy.

Melany asks Hephaestus about the Shadowboxes which he makes. He explains to her that each box is aimed at one individual, hence she could not have taken Callie's invitation or arrived at the academy if she did not truly belong there. Yet Melany feels different, even at the academy. She feels drawn to the shadows and has a feeling that they are stalking her. Dionysus even comments that she has a black aura. In the flying lesson, she produces black wings, while the other students all produce red ones. Melany is also the only one who can see and talk to Hades within the academy, which he is not allowed to enter for the reason we are not told yet.

One day Melany and her friends hear of strange phenomena, such as earthquakes, which occur in their hometowns. They decide to go and check even though they may risk expulsion from the academy if they are caught. Back home, Melany sadly discovers that the Demos estate is in ruins and apparently Sophia did not survive. The group is apprehended upon their return, yet Melany takes all the blame. Zeus gives her a choice, that if she can hold his lighting for 2 minutes, she can be pardoned. Melany succeeds, since the strange shadows secretly engulf her, protecting her from the lightning.

In the end, Melany is the only student who passes all of her final exams/trials for the first year. In order to pass the school year, the students are required to succeed in twelve trials, one for each god. At the closing ceremony, during which the students are allocated to groups under the tutelage of the individual gods, suddenly Hades appears and claims her. The book ends with these cliffhangers.

Analysis

As with similar young adult fantasy series, some reviewed in this survey, for example, *Mount Olympus Academy* or *Olympus Academy*,

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the mythological setting is the background for the emotional drama which is the main focus of the narrative.

Melany had a rough start to life, her parents died when she was young (the cause of their death is not revealed yet) and she drifted in foster care until meeting Sophia, her mother's estranged sister. She feels like an outsider, which, in fact, she is. Hence, she makes herself also appear different, with the tattoos and blue hair and piercings, as if creating an off-putting exterior could protect her from additional emotional damage. Melany is a tough girl and acts accordingly, yet she is kind and caring as a heroine of such type of novels should be.

Melany does not believe in the gods, although she lives in a society where such belief is common. As she notes, "To me, the whole thing was just a story passed down from generation to generation, going on more than a hundred years now. A story we all grew up listening to and reading about in our children's books about the resurgence of the Gods during the New Dawn." (p. 4). Later she adds regarding the Shadowbox, "For me, it was just as much a myth as the Gods themselves." (p. 5). However, she does have some opinion on the gods, especially Aphrodite. When she describes Callie from the Demos estate, she mentions that Callie was so beautiful that people compared her to Aphrodite, but Melany is not fooled, "I thought she also possessed some of the Goddess's character traits as well: vain, sly, and just a little bit diabolical." (p. 4). We, therefore, get a sense that Aphrodite will not be a benevolent character in this novel.

While Melany does feel out of place both in her earlier life and also at the academy, it appears that her intuition was indeed justified. She is different, but this difference can be interpreted as unique and special, which is another common trope of fantasy YA novels, and also appears in the works mentioned above (as well of course in Rick Riordan's *Percy Jackson* series). When Melany discovers she was indeed invited to the academy, she is emotional, "I nodded to him, trying hard not to sob with elation at the fact that I was supposed to be here. That I was invited by the Gods to train in the Gods' Army. That they wanted me, Melany Richmond, poor orphan girl, rebel, troublemaker, and not Callie Demos, the perfect specimen of Greek devotion, to come to the legendary academy." (p. 75). However, her admiration for the gods soon turns into bitter disappointment when Demeter tries to dissuade her from going back home after hearing the news of the earthquakes, "The Gods worked in mysterious ways, my ass. They were just jerks." (p. 133).

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In the end, Melany wishes to belong somewhere, but even in the academy she does not feel automatically at ease, and there is a feeling that perhaps she truly belongs somewhere else. This longing to belong is another common trope of YA novels but here, due to the mythological and mystical setting, it is amplified. How can one decide to which world they belong? Demeter advises Melany to embrace her differences and rejoice in them, but it is still difficult for her.

While being able to communicate with shadows and being chosen by Hades may have a sinister feel to it, we do not have the entire picture yet. The gods seem to be hiding their own secrets, especially Ares and Aphrodite, and it is possible that Hades might turn out to be on the side of good and justice.

In the end, the gods in this story are not described as larger than life or wondrous. They possess special powers and are strong, but their presence does not seem too intimidating. Demeter for example is described as resembling a hippie and Dionysus is a drunken DJ. The gods also use the mortals they have chosen as their pawns to fight their war against the Titans, a mystery war which may happen in the future, as Hera explains to the students, "this is why you are being trained," she said, her voice rising to a crescendo. "You will be the Gods' Army, to fight by our side in the event our enemies are unleashed on the Earth." (p. 52). The gods make it appear as if the students would defend earth, but how they will do so is unclear at this point.

Classical, Mythological, Traditional Motifs, Characters, and Concepts	Aphrodite Ares Athena Demeter Dionysus / Dionysos Erebus Hades Hephaestus Hera Heracles Zeus
Other Motifs, Figures, and Concepts Relevant for Children and Youth Culture	Adventure Death Emotions Friendship Heroism Individuality Invention Journeys Learning Magic War

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